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Okinawa-based Marines provide support in wake of tsunami

MARINE CORPS BASE, CAMP S.D. BUTLER, OKINAWA, Japan - Humanitarian Assistance Assessment Teams with the III Marine Expeditionary Force departed today for Southeast Asia to identify requirements for temporary humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the wake of the recent tsunami. The results of the assessments will determine the resources needed to aid those affected by this terrible tragedy in Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

The III Marine Expeditionary Force assessment teams and Forward Command Element (FCE) will deploy to Utapao, Thailand to establish the command, control and communication structure as the U.S. Pacific Command's Joint Task Force-536.

The FCE and follow-on JTF will coordinate U.S. military relief efforts in the region. The FCE and JTF will continue to work with the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, host nations and humanitarian relief agencies to identify requirements and coordinate relief efforts.

The focus of the mission will be to prevent further loss of life and human suffering by expeditiously applying resources to the overall relief effort.

The Joint Task Force-536 Commander and III Marine Expeditionary Force Commanding General, Lt. Gen. Robert R. Blackman, conveyed his deepest condolence to the people of Southeast Asia.

"U.S. forces are moving rapidly to provide the needs and services requested by the governments of the region," Blackman said. "Our primary concern is to prevent further loss of life, and to conduct sustained disaster relief operations."

The forward presence of Marines on Okinawa significantly contributes to U.S. ability to respond to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and to alleviate human suffering. U.S. forces will remain only as long as necessary to conduct sustained disaster relief operations.